

TOPANGA FIRE



**FIRE NARRATIVE
TOPANGA FIRE
CA-LAC-208724
9/28/05—10/6/05**

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT:

**LAC ICT TEAM 3
(BRYANT/OSBY)**

**CDF ICT TEAM 7
(HEIL)**



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After Action Report
Topanga Fire
CA-LAC208724
28, Sept 2005 – 6, Oct 2005

Executive Summary

On 28, Sept 2005 at 1350 hours, Los Angeles County Fire dispatch received a report of a vegetation fire at Hwy 118 and Topanga Canyon Road in the State Responsibility Area. Los Angeles County Fire, Ventura County Fire and Los Angeles City Fire jointly dispatched a full wildland assignment to the area under mutual threat.

First arriving units reported approximately 2 acres with a rapid rate of spread. Based on current Northeast wind conditions, a large order of equipment for structure protection was initiated along with LAC Incident Management Team 3. Within the first 3 hours a major fire situation had developed with the potential for extensive property destruction. Unified command, which consisted of Ventura County Fire, Los Angeles County Fire, and Los Angeles City Fire, made the decision to order a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Agency Representative, a significant amount of resources under the California Fire Assistance Agreement, and CDF Incident Command Team 7.

Due to rate of spread, initial control objectives were defensive and centered on structure protection and evacuations.

Unified command established control objectives, which consisted of keeping the fire

- 1) North of Hwy 101
- 2) South of Hwy 126
- 3) East of Westlake Bl.
- 4) West of Valley Circle

At the height of the fire 2,790 people were working throughout 7 Branches and 21 Divisions before containment was reached on October 4th at 1800 hrs. Total acreage was 24,175 with jurisdiction involving Ventura County Fire, Los Angeles County Fire (State Responsibility Direct Protection), Los Angeles City Fire, and National Park Service. During the course of the incident all control objectives were met.

Damage and Savings

Property damage included 3 homes, 3 commercial buildings, various outbuildings, and other improvements lost. Property loss estimates were placed at \$2,049,000. Property dollar save figures where actual suppression action was taken is estimated is \$804,250,000. Property values saved due to vegetation modification, defensible space clearance, and fire resistant construction are estimated at several Billion dollars. A detailed damage inspection report was compiled and presented to agencies involved.

The following sections will outline weather, fuels, and conditions that contributed to the incident.

Weather

A strong ridge of high pressure had developed offshore from Northern California and created a strong offshore wind pattern through Southern California on the morning of the 28th. Although not a true Santa Ana foehn wind by definition, it still created a strong north influence for the next 36 hours. Weather readings from the following RAWS sites reflect the weather conditions at the time of ignition.

Thousand Oaks: (1400 hrs) Temp. 93, RH 12%, wind NE @ 14mph with an hourly peak of 31mph.

Simi Valley: (1400 hrs) Temp. 93, RH 12%, wind NE @ 16mph with an hourly peak of 23mph.

Cheseboro: (1400 hrs) Temp. 89, RH 19%, wind ENE @ 24mph with an hourly peak of 50mph.

Fuels

The fuels within the area represent Native California Chaparral, Sumac, Chamise, Mixed Sage, Ceanothus, and annual grass. The grass component is abundant this year due to significant rainfall in 2004. Fuel Model 4 at approximately 8-12 TPA. Fuel Model 1 and 3 at 1.5-3 TPA.

The grass component in the area averaged approximately 36 inches. The larger fuels are dormant with Live Fuel Moistures near 60%. The Burning Index (BI) was at 70. A BI of 70 places the Fire Danger Index as “moderate” condition for large fire development. A BI of 70 places below the 97th percentile. The 97th percentile is set at 128. The Los Angeles County Fire Department “LA Forecast Zone” Pocket Card was utilized.

Fuel samples of Chamise taken on Sept. 23 in Topanga Cyn indicated live fuel moisture of 62%. An accepted critical fuel moisture level of Chamise is 60%.

Fire Behavior

The fire started along the 118 Freeway on a flat transitioning to a South Aspect with an average slope of 40%. Observed flame lengths were 3-6 feet with head fire out of alignment with wind. The wind force was a greater than slope at the fire origin. The fire Spotted across the 118 Freeway on an Easterly facing aspect. The spot fire was approximately ¼ mile ahead of the origin and was in alignment with wind and slope. The fire displayed increased rates of spread and extreme fire behavior due to wind domination. Flame lengths of 15-60 feet were observed. Rates of spread were calculated and observed at 80-120 chains per hour(5280-9600 ft. per hr) The fire made the greatest run traveling approximately 7 miles in 7 hrs. Thresholds identified for the area to contribute to a wind dominated fire are: Eye level winds at greater than 7 mph with Relative Humidity at or below 15%. The spotting distance was up to ¼ to 1 mile ahead of the fire front. The fire on day two was in a transition period from being wind

dominated to topography driven. A light onshore flow created a North/Northeast to Southeast fire spread. The fire on 9/30/05 was moving laterally along most flanks with major topographic features dominating the fire behavior. The fire transition now went to a topography driven fire.

Topography

The dominant topographical features in the fire area are N/NE to S/SW oriented drainages, leading to a repeated pattern of long narrow wind driven fires during North wind events. Several areas are punctuated by extremely steep and rocky terrain.

Special Hazards

A potential hazard in the area was the Rocketdyne facility which is a defense contractor dealing with rocket propulsion technology. There were three buildings lost on the compound during the fire, but no hazardous materials were reported compromised.

Area Fire History

This area of Southern California has a significant large fire history in September, October, and November. The following predominant large fires all occurred during this timeframe:

Devonshire/Parker	(1967)	23,093 Acres
Clampitt	(1970)	115,537 Acres
Wright	(1970)	28,201 Acres
Oat	(1981)	17,787 Acres
Dayton Cyn	(1982)	43,096 Acres
Calabasas	(1996)	12,512 Acres
Simi	(2003)	107,570 Acres

Potential

Because fires in this area have a high potential of major incidents during wind events, the area fire agencies have aggressive initial attack plans. It is widely recognized that the Hwy 101 choke point 1 mile either side of Las Virgenes Cyn is a historical slop-over point of past fires. This became a prime concern of Unified Command and a contingency plan was developed to deal with this potential. If Hwy 101 became compromised and the fire progressed westward in a wind event, past history suggested that the fire would run to the beach communities.

Assets at Risk

Assets at risk during the incident included the Rocketdyne facility, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and widespread urban interface with high value homes.

Name: Steve Heil/ Brad Harris ICT 7	Date: 9-28-05
Section: Incident Commander	

Summary:

The fire began in the County of Los Angeles at 1:50 P.M. , north of the 118 Freeway in Simi Valley. The wind driven fire quickly spread and crossed the 118 Freeway entering the jurisdictions of Los Angeles City, Ventura County, National Parks Service, and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Early in the fire it was determined that a “unified command” would need to be established to handle the complexities of this multi-jurisdictional fire. The fire required the establishment of seven operational branches, twenty one divisions, and two staging areas. 3,000 firefighters, from numerous agencies, were assigned to suppress the fire. The fire was contained at 24,175 acres.

Two Incident Command Teams were assigned to manage the fire (CDF ICT 7 & LACoFD IMT 3). Both teams were integrated together to manage the incident.

Challenges:

Operations

- Early in the fire four separate Operations Section Chiefs shared the responsibility of managing the resources on a complex incident. This caused a great deal of confusion on priorities on the incident. One Operation Section Chief was identified as the lead (with three deputy Ops) reducing the confusion of the incident.
- Some initial attack resources were not entered into MIRP, creating possible complications in FMAG reimbursements and developing an IAP.

Communications

- The three initial attack agencies normally operate on separate frequencies and bands (800 mhz, 470 mhz, and VHF). This caused delays in coordinating the forces assigned to the fire. The problem was overcome by utilizing a “patch” device to link a LACoFD and a CDF command nets. The communication problem existed for two days, until the patch device arrived from Riverside County.
- Delays in filling MIRPS requests occurred at the unified ordering point (LACoFD), causing a delay in the arrival of critical resources.

Accomplishments:

Command

- The involved agencies entered into Unified Command ensuring that all needs were met on the incident, without giving up jurisdictional control.
- All resources were ordered through a unified ordering point , reducing the amount of duplicated resources.
- Unified incident commanders worked well together.

Operations

- One Operation Section Chief was identified as the lead. Three Deputy Operation Section Chiefs worked with the Operation Section Chief to meet the needs of all affected jurisdictions.

Logistics

- One base camp serviced the incident, a spike camp was set up on the eastern side of the fire to support LAFD resources, reducing their travel time.

Finance

- All Finance Sections were located in one general area. This enabled them to speak directly together to coordinate the payment of vendors.

Safety

- Unified Safety Officers maintained a common safety message to all assigned personnel.

Information

- In a large media market it was imperative that a common message went out to the public. By unifying the information section all jurisdictions were equally represented without compromising any jurisdictions needs.

Planning Section

- One plan was produced for the incident and briefed to field personnel. All jurisdictional needs were addressed in the plan.

Recommendation:

Command

- All agencies continue to use unified command in areas where the incident affects multiple jurisdictions
- All agencies continue to train and keep the open lines of communications together
- CDF increase the number of members from LAFD and LACoFD on CDF Command Teams

Communications

- A formal interoperability plan should be established for this region.
- Grants should be sought out to purchase interoperability devices.
- CDF add the interoperability devices to all CDF MCC's.

Pre-suppression

- Continue with the aggressive defensible space programs in the individual jurisdictions.

Name: Mike Bryant/ Daryl Osby LAC	Date: 09/28/05
Section: Unified Incident Commander & Deputy Incident Commander (Los Angeles County IMT-3)	

Summary:

A grass fire occurred in the early afternoon on Wednesday, September 28th, 2005, just North of the 118 fwy & Topanga Blvd. Los Angeles County, Los Angeles City and Ventura County Fire Departments dispatched first alarm brush assignments. First alarm units requested additional resources. The fire jumped the 118 fwy and headed in a S/W direction towards Thousand Oaks, City of Los Angeles, Box & Bell Canyons, Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Oak Park, and Hidden Hills, primarily due to the N/E Santa Ana winds. At the time the fire started, N/E winds were estimated between 20–30 mph.

Initial attack operations commenced North & South of the 118 fwy. The initial Incident Command Post (ICP) was located on the 118 fwy, just West of Topanga Blvd. Unified command was established with Los Angeles County (LAC), Los Angeles City (LFD) and Ventura County (VNC). California Department of Forestry (CDF) Agency Representative on scene at the ICP. The FMAG process was initiated/approved via LAC Command & Control. The evacuation plan was assigned to LAC County Planning Ops personnel for all the communities North of the 101 fwy. A unified ordering point was established through LAC. Transitioned the ICP/Base to the Lost Hills Community Center which was later moved to Conejo Creek Park in Thousand Oaks. Established communication & coordination with CDF Incident Command Team 7 (Steve Heil) & LAC Incident Management Team 3 (Mike Bryant & Daryl Osby). Developed the IAP, and provided management, and command and control for the incident. Unified Command eventually included five agencies (CDF, LAC, LFD, VNC, National Park Service-NPS)

Challenges:

Command:

- Initial incident commanders did not specify some of their additional resource orders, e.g.. structure protection, perimeter control, state or local mission(s), etc.
- Initial unified command was not functioning in a complete manner, e.g.. separate command post locations, two ordering points and some operational components were based on jurisdictional boundaries.
- Initial inability to fully identify resources that were deployed and/or ordered.

Operations:

- Under unified command having four Operation Section Chiefs did not work effectively. However, adjustments were made after the first operational period.
- The operational plan between initial attack IC's and command team's Operation Section Chiefs did not synchronize. Therefore resulting in an initial IAP that did not identify specific operational resources.
- Limited familiarization and utilization of programmable radios.

Logistics:

- Communication interoperability component was not operational in an expeditious manner.
- Initially, there were not enough hand-held radios for key command and operational positions.
- In some instances, personnel did not utilize incident medical procedures; outside resources were inappropriately requested to handle incident medical emergencies.
- Initial incident base was not large enough to support the expanding incident prompting a move to another location.

Challenges (cont.)

- Continue to improve familiarization with Infrared equipment and coordination with Situation Unit.

Plans:

- Initial inability to fully reconcile resources on the incident in an expeditious manner.

Dispatch:

- LAC Expanded Dispatch did not process initial resource orders in a timely manner.
- Multiple orders were processed sequentially, critical orders were not prioritized.

Accomplishments:

Incident:

- Unified Command at all levels of the incident (collaboration, communication and coordination).
- Early establishment of an Evacuation Branch. Coordination and communication with multiple law enforcement and animal control agencies; quickly establishing a comprehensive evacuation plan with trigger points.
- Contingency planning and support of local agencies regarding adjusting draw down levels to support the plan.
- Utilization of 24-hour operational periods for operational personnel as applicable primarily due to limited resources.
- Good public information to communities and public officials.
- Advanced planning associated with the demobilization of resources.
- Liaison officers ability to effectively coordinate/inform cooperating agencies.
- Seamless move of incident base/ICP.
- Coordination of fixed wing aircraft and helicopter resources during extending attack periods.
- Utilization of IMT-3 fiscal advisor for cost apportionment and cost sharing process.
- Met Incident Control and Management Objectives

Recommendations:

- One Operations Section Chief should be established and assign Deputy Operations Chief as necessary (unified command agencies).
- Prioritize resource orders based on critical and/or immediate need.
- Procure regional interoperability radio/communication equipment, portable hand-held radio caches, etc. for initial attack use on an expanding incident.
- Explore current technology to improve the ability to track resources at a large-scale incident.

Name: Kevin Nestor	Date: 9-28-05
Section: Incident Commander, VNC	

Summary:

On 9-28-05 at 1354 the Fire Departments from Ventura County, City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles were responded to a brush fire north of Hwy 118 just west of Topanga Canyon Blvd. The fire spread rapidly south over Hwy 118 into the jurisdictions of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles City, Ventura County, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the National Parks Service.

Unified Command was initiated early into the incident with the three (3) responding agencies. It was decided by the IC's that Los Angeles County would be the ordering point for the County agencies. It was also agreed on that a CDF team would be ordered to work with LA County's IMT to manage the incident.

The incident was organized into seven (7) branches, twenty-one (21) divisions, and two (2) staging areas. The incident was staffed with 3,000 personnel from numerous agencies. The fire was contained to 24,175 acres.

Challenges:

OPERATIONS

- ❑ During the initial attack phase of the fire multiple Operation Chiefs from different agencies were assigned which caused confusion as it related to resource deployment and strategy implementation.
- ❑ Though maintaining a spike camp in LA City Station 106 provided for less travel time it also caused some confusion for resources that worked in Br I & II

COMMUNICATIONS

- ❑ Each of the three agencies arrived on scene utilizing their respective command and tactical channels which limited the abilities of field resources to effectively communicate
- ❑ Communication problems persisted through multiple operational periods.
- ❑ The first significant resource orders did not reach South Ops until late in the first operational period which may have cause some delays in the arrival of resources

RESOURCE ORDERING

- ❑ Two (2) ordering points were maintained throughout the incident.

TRANSITION

- ❑ The initial attack Command Staff and Operations Section did not adequately prepare for an effective transition to the command teams.

Accomplishments:

COMMAND

- ❑ Unified Command was agreed upon early in the incident with active participation from each agency
- ❑ Cooperating agencies at the Command and General staff levels worked well together

OPERATIONS

- ❑ Utilizing one (1) Operations Chief with multiple deputies was superior to having multiple Operations Chiefs that managed by committee

LOGISTICS

- ❑ The base camp provided for adequate space to support the incident as well additional space that could have been used if the incident would have escalated.

INFORMATION

- ❑ Having a Unified Information Section provided for a common message and was able to meet the needs of the multiple agencies having jurisdiction on the incident

Recommendation:**COMMAND**

- ❑ Agencies that commonly respond together along their jurisdictional boundaries should regularly participate in command and control simulation.
- ❑ Each agency should be committed to building and maintaining relationships with their partner agencies so that a cooperative spirit exists at the onset of large incidents

COMMUNICATIONS

- ❑ A communications plan that provides for interoperability needs to be created and used in the region.

Name: Tony M. Varela, LFD	Date: October 4, 2005
Section: Incident Commander	

Summary:

On September 28, 2005 at 1347 hrs. Los Angeles Fire Department Operations Control Dispatch Section dispatched a full alarm brush assignment to the 118 Freeway at Topanga Canyon. First arriving units found approximately 1-2 acres of light brush being pushed by a north wind. Los Angeles County and Ventura County sent brush assignments as well. Within minutes, Los Angeles Battalion 14 Commander Pat Stanley divided the fire into Divisions and Branches as the fire quickly jumped boundaries and was into Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Unified Command was established as the other jurisdictions arrived. The original Command post was set up on the 118 Freeway and was moved at 2100 hrs. to the Agoura Hills Community Center. The Unified Command component was effectively planning and organizing for the potential run to the ocean. The Unified Commanders identified control objectives that were effectively utilized for the duration of the fire. As they were doing so, fire ground operations were effectively being directed by Operations. By 0100 hrs. on 9-29-2005, the fire had grown to approximately 3500 acres. As the size of the fire increased the decision to move the Command Post to Conejo Creek Park for base camp was made by the Command Team. Numerous fire stands were made in an effort to keep the fire from burning homes. My personal telephone calls to branch directors found that the fire fight had been more severe and harrowing than first thought. The branch directors called for numerous strike teams to augment their existing resources. This tells me that they had to handle more than they thought they could. This being a great example of our member's fortitude in the face of adversity. The efforts taken to stop the fire at the 101 freeway as well as keeping the fire out of Bell Canyon, is another example of the members tremendous work ethic. The winds during the initial stage of the fire caused the affected area to rapidly grow in size. This caused deployment problems in areas such as Bell Canyon due to homes being surrounded by brush. Box and Woosley Canyons also posed a significant threat to life and property. Concerted efforts by the Unified Command Team and field resources were able to establish containment lines and minimize structure loss to three homes and a few out buildings. The final burn area amounted to 24,175 acres through various agencies.

Challenges:

1. The initial Incident Commander took the fire and proceeded to divide the fire and place resources. As well as the fire went; we could have communicated better between the initial commanders and used a one point-ordering source for our resources. The Los Angeles Fire Department used their dispatch to get additional resources during the early stage of the fire.
2. Communications was another issue that was causing problems for the initial attack companies. The City resources operate on 800 MHZ while the Counties operate on VHF frequencies. This disparity has caused problems in the past and will continue to cause problems in the future. The interoperability equipment that we recently purchased will help rectify the problem we have when various agencies respond to the same incident with different radio capabilities.
3. Four agency representatives initially supported the Operations position. The confusion this caused was rectified once identified by the Incident Commander.
4. Initial attack IC failed to utilize 154.400 to direct the air resources. This was fixed at a later time as LACFD took over Helco.
5. Radio programming seemed to be a constant problem that we need to get fixed. The efforts put forth by the Communications Unit is to be commended, but we still had problems.

Accomplishments:

1. Unified Command established
2. The California Department of Forestry did an excellent job of coordinating the various agencies into a productive work group.
3. The Operations Chief did an excellent job of taking control of the fire and establishing the ground rules.
4. The great effort provided by our firefighters was the difference between the fire stopping at the 101 freeway and going to the ocean.
5. Logistics worked diligently to get the base camp up and running, and when they did, it supported the incident well.
6. The Public Information Officers did an outstanding job working with the public. The Fire Service received positive press for being organized and prepared.

Recommendation:

1. That the local agencies continue to work together in an effort to improve interoperability.
2. That radio communications be evaluated for interoperability and the findings addressed in short order.
3. That involved agencies plan and execute tabletop drills in preparation for large events.
4. That the local agencies plan inter-agency drills where the fireground members get to work with each other on fire ground operations.
5. That the good work our firefighters completed not be wasted and that we use this incident to secure radios, tools and equipment they need to do a good job by garnering support of our City Councils to support budget requests.

Name: Kathy Kirkpatrick, NPS	Date: 9/28/2006
Section: Incident Commander	

Summary:
<p>The 2005 Topanga Fire began September 28, 2005 on the boundary of Los Angeles County and Ventura County Fire Department jurisdictions. Over the next 24 hours the fire rapidly progressed onto lands within the jurisdiction of the city of Los Angeles, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and Santa Monica National Recreation Area. The fire was a wind driven Santa Ana event. A structure defense control strategy was the selected suppression alternative starting with initial attack. Given the rapid rate of spread, proximity of the wildland fire to neighboring development, rapid build-up of the suppression response, and the expected short timeframe required to implement the control strategy the Recreation Area was comfortable with control strategy continuance. The winds diminished and resources were available to strategize a fire perimeter control strategy late in the second burning period.</p>

Challenges:
<p><u>Pre-Planning:</u> A plan amenable to all the agencies has not been formulated for maintaining and utilizing strategic geographical positions along the wildland urban interface was other than a defense of the 101 corridor during a wildland or wind driven fire.</p> <p><u>Unified Command:</u> The teams LAC and CDF teams integrated early. The land was primarily VNC yet their team or command personnel were absent except at the IC level.</p> <p><u>Initial Operational Strategy:</u> Resources that tactically perform direct and indirect attack were not able to coordinate to contain the wildland fire. The suppression strategy of structure protection is valid but requires a direct fireline control strategy with appropriate resources and overhead ordered for that purpose.</p> <p><u>Radio Communications:</u> Fire Scope emphasized common communications as a safety priority in interagency emergency response. At this time different MHz radio systems are an obstacle to providing fire fighters with one radio to communicate during an interagency incident. This is our most serious safety issue.</p> <p><u>Security:</u> The need to provide for public safety by denying entry into the fire should be provided and coordinated by the incident.</p> <p><u>Bin:</u> Too many branches too many divisions, too many resources, span of control. Not identifying divisions on the fire's edge.</p>

Accomplishments::
<p><u>Unified Command:</u> This was established during the first burning period an important avenue for providing a cohesive plan. The cooperative leadership at the command level between the five IC's provided a stable environment for the incident to operate. The added benefit is the network of leaders of agencies enabling swifter working relationships in incident operations and pre-planning.</p> <p><u>Unified Incident Public Information:</u> One message to the public and equal access to public attention benefited all the agencies</p> <p><u>Coordinated Public Safety:</u> Evacuations and closures via the fire departments and local law enforcement was extremely successful.</p> <p><u>Operational planning after the 30th:</u> One Operations Chief and one IAP addressing a unified and comprehensive plan</p>

Recommendations:

Pre-planning: Commitment to strategizing incident pre-planning in terms of resources, communications, effective defensible flanking operations, effective defensible space, strategic fuels reduction. Provide local resources and incoming resources with maps of these road and topographical strategic points.

Safety: Order Security (SECM and SEC1). Coordinate with local law enforcement. Note that NPS has federally commissioned officers.

Communications: Reinforce, update and upgrade communications to achieve seamless communications between resources from dispatch to demob. This will require information sharing, cooperation and networking between agencies.

Finance: Order a federal time keeper.

Resource ordering: Utilize the difference between Type 1, 2, 3 and 4 engines during strategic planning. Strategize a wildland component and structure defense component. Order state and federal and county wildland crews and wildland overhead. Expect them to anchor, flank, observe fire behavior and choose points of attack.

Name: Kevin O’Leary & Gary Curtis	Date: 10/04/05
Section: Safety Section	

Summary:

The Safety Section of the Topanga Incident was well staffed with a lead Safety Officer and a Safety Trainee assigned to Incident Base. Total staffing was 24 personnel with Safety Officer Curtis serving as the lead for all field Safety Officers. We had a total of one (1) Procedure 200 reportable events which was a burn injury to an inmate in the kitchen. There were a total of 27 reportable injuries, 7 accidents and one (1) event involving a helicopter. All injuries were minor in nature.

We had excellent cooperation with our L.A. County counter parts in the Safety Section. We had good reporting relationships between safety, information and liaison. We finally established a good reporting system with the Medical Unit due to some confusion as to the lead agency. We had two safety officers assigned to all incident base safety inspections and issues. This helped make our base operation very safe and kept everyone focused on safety issues at base. Given the size, location, and complexity of this incident and the number people fighting this fire I feel that the safety record is extraordinary. Safety was the number one priority of our I.C as well as the Operations Section.

Challenges:

- Communications continues to be our main concern. This issue is a life safety issue for personnel working on major incidents. If we don’t get this issue fixed, peoples lives will be at serious risk and everyday we will be in violation of LCES. We must have radio’s and frequencies that allow us all to talk to each other easily. Without this we will be back where we were 30 plus years ago with uncoordinated efforts and independent actions on our incidents. This is absolutely unacceptable in our day and age.
- The notification processes of injuries and accidents between some Unified Command Agencies was very frustrating, however, after addressing the issue with the Unified Incident Commanders and addressing it in the Safety messages, it did improve.
- We found numerous PPE violations, mostly no fire shelter being worn by personnel from non-wildland agencies. We addressed this with the agencies involved, but there seemed to be a lack of concern about this violation. All personnel working in the wildland environment must have their have all their Personal Protective Equipment on.

Accomplishments:

- Having personnel assigned to us from our Unified Command cooperators was a big plus on this incident. We had individuals from Los Angeles County Incident Management Team 3 assigned with us and it proved to be a learning process for everyone involved. We both developed excellent working relationships with each other and learned about policies and procedures of both agencies. It also proved very beneficial in regards to historical fire information about fires in this area and geographical information. The experience was very positive and beneficial.
- The ability to staff the Safety Section with enough personnel to handle all of the field as well as Base needs gave us the ability to address any and all safety needs of the incident.

Recommendation:

Under Unified Command we have multiple Incident Commanders setting unified objectives and priorities. However, we should not have 2 Incident Command Teams operating under that. There should be one Team as the lead and you can plug key individuals from the out-going team into specific disciplines under the lead Teams direction. We do not need 2 Comm. Units, or 2 Medical Unit Leaders, etc. etc. This leads to redundant efforts and a bog down in issue resolutions. And sometimes one unit doesn’t know what the other is doing or has done. This can and has led to serious safety concerns. We know that politically it can help foster better relationships, but operationally it does not work well and can lead to serious safety consequences. We should apply Unified Command the way it was designed and all agencies should realize the fact that the system works more efficiently when used as designed.

Name: Tracy Gouette	Date: 10-03-2005
Section: Information	

Summary:

CDF Incident. Command Team #7, Los Angeles County Incident Command Team #3, Ventura County Fire, Los Angeles Fire Department, and National Parks Service established a unified information section at the incident. LAC, LFD, VNC continued to staff their own media centers to take incident calls. They also received Topanga Incident "Fact Sheets" which were faxed twice daily by the Information Section. Trap lines, camp boards, community outreach, and other media were handled and coordinated from the incident, by the assigned Information Section at the Incident.

NOTEABLE EVENTS:

- At 0600 hours on September 29, 2005, Transition of command was made and a "Unified Command" was established.
- At approx. 0800 hours, a group meeting was held involving all agencies IO's that would be assigned to this fire. This proved invaluable as every agency, was on the same page right from the beginning.
- A press conference took place at 1100 hours involving local elected officials and the Incident Commanders.
- At approximately 1500 hours, the Information Section transitioned from the Calabasas/Agoura Community Center to the newly established Base Camp located at Conejo Creek Park in Thousand Oaks.
- At approximately 1030 hours on Friday September 30th another press conference was held involving Congressman Elton Gallegly and other local officials.
- On Thursday September 29 2005, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's office notified the Incident that he would be arriving at the Incident Base Camp for a press conference, on Friday. The Governor's advance team worked well with the Information Section, and the press conference was very much a success.

From the beginning, this incident generated a substantial amount of media attention. In addition to the major Los Angeles and other local media outlets, the National Media was also quick to respond. For the Information Section, much of the first two days of this incident was spent conducting interviews for camera, newspaper, and radio outlets. For the National News East Coast outlets, many live interviews were conducted in the early morning hours.

Challenges:

- Did not have adequate office space with adequate support equipment.
- Did not pre-establish media parking (did not anticipate the amount of "boom truck" and support vehicles).
- Did not have an Information Officer from each agency assigned for the duration of the incident.

Accomplishments:

- Inter-agency cooperation from the very beginning; Key in the success of the Incident
- One unified distribution point for media information (allowed all agencies to speak with one voice).
- Increased number of Information Officers at beginning of incident due to multiple agencies working together, and staffed by the departments having well trained, competent IO's. Especially in the initial attack stages of the fire.

Recommendation:

- It is very important that the Information Section be given a trailer equipped with phones, fax, computer connections (Internet), television, and a copy machine. These items are vital to efficient information gathering and dissemination.
- Have an Information Officer from each agency of the Unified Command structure, assigned to the incident for the duration of the incident.

Name: Stan Lake ,CDF Clint Kaller ,LAC	Date: 9/28/05 – 10/6/05
Section: Liaison	

Summary:

CDF ICT 7 and LA County IMT 3 worked in unified command with Ventura County, LA City, and National Park Service to manage and control the Topanga Fire. During this 24,000+-acre fire the Liaison function worked with well over twenty different agencies and organizations. Included were responsible law enforcement agencies from the affected area, the State correctional agency, utility companies, transportation and public works agencies as well as a school district and the Red Cross. The Liaison met with activated local emergency operations centers and briefed them on the fire situation.

Challenges:

- Three days into the fire we discovered State Park land was affected within the incident boundary.
- Contact with CCC Agency Representative was made two days after their arrival at the ICP.

Accomplishments:

- Staffing from CDF Team 7 and LA County Team 3 were on-scene quickly and worked together well.
- Having Qualified and Trainee Liaison Officers from different agencies improved the efficiency of the Liaison's role.
- Having three Liaison Officers on this complex incident expedited the resolving of issues, problems, and planned needs.
- A Liaison Officer Trainee had his Task Book initiated and completed several required tasks.
- Meeting with local EOCs met one of the issues addressed by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission.

Recommendation:

- Ensure the Liaison function is sufficiently staffed for complex incidents. It is preferred to have different agencies involved to improved communications and coordination.
- Continue to provide information to local entities by meeting with officials at activated EOCs during major fires or other disasters.

Name: Kelley Gouette/Craig Konklin	10/4/05
Section: Operations ICT 7	

Summary:

The Operations section of the Topanga incident was initially organized with an Operations Chief from each agency (LAC, LFD, and VNC) who supervised resources assigned to each counties geographical area. Although the command was unified and each of the Operations Chiefs had contact with each other, essentially each Operations Chief was planning and coordinating the Operations section more like Branch Directors than as Operations Chiefs looking at the entire incident as a whole. The initial Operations organization also consisted of 7 geographic Branches and a Structure Branch with 11 Structure Protection Groups. During the planning meeting on the evening of the 28th, the decision was made to combine several of these groups and re-assign their supervision to the geographic Branches, eliminating the Structure Protection Branch position due to the fact that these structure groups were spread out over a large geographic area. CDF ICT #7 transitioned in at 0600 On 9/28. During this operational period there were actually now 4 Operations Chiefs with the addition of the CDF Team. The fire was very active at this time and resulted in each Operations Chief being extremely busy supervising operations. Because of this, the planning process involving the 215 suffered. On the 29th the Unified Command decided to implement the Operations component of the IAP under one Operations Chief with 3 Deputy Operations Chiefs to supervise the Branch Directors in the Ventura, LA County and LA City geographic areas. At the height of the incident the Operations section was organized into three Deputy Operations (LA City, LA County, Ventura County) and a Deputy Operations for Planning, 7 geographic Branches, 24 Divisions and several Structure Protection Groups. Beginning on the 31 this organization began to downscale with the complexity of the incident.

Challenges:

- The biggest problem from an operational standpoint on the incident was communications. With multiple agencies it seems that communications is always an issue but with over 3,000 personnel assigned there were unique challenges. One challenge was the fact that many of the Los Angeles area metropolitan agencies are not used to working with CDF and federal wildland agencies and are not equipped with VHF radios, but rather use UHF and 800 mghz radios. The 800 MHz radios used by different agencies are also not compatible. The Communications Unit worked hard to provide a workable plan but there were numerous instances where resources and overhead could not communicate on Command, Tactical and Air-Ground frequencies. The other communication issue was the use of narrow band frequencies by the federal agencies. The tactical frequencies that are narrow banded are not able to be programmed into older HT's used by CDF and local government. This also caused safety related communication problems that were of a magnitude to have significant consequences in critical situations.
- The incident was equipped with an Infra Red unit that was used to detect hotspots near the fire perimeter. This is useful information in assisting with the detection of spots outside the line and in mopping up those areas near the fire edge. The unit assigned did not have newer printers and plotters designed to produce a large quantity of maps and the GIS unit was not able to take on the additional workload of producing IR maps. The IR unit also does not produce the IR data in a GIS format allowing for the lat/long data to be placed on the map. This is useful info for the firefighters to facilitate mop-up. Again, the GIS unit did not have the capability to convert the data to GIS and produce a high quality IR map with lat/long data.
- Maps in general on an incident need to be of higher quality. This area, as with most of southern California and other areas in the state, have undergone tremendous development. The topographic maps we use are old and outdated and do not provide many of the updated roads to allow firefighters to properly navigate. Trying to photocopy these maps in mass quantities makes for lower resolution that are difficult to read when we add ICS symbology and other overlays.
- The operational planning process was not successful during the first operational period. The use of four Operations Chiefs combined with a dynamic and rapidly escalating urban interface incident made the 215 planning process difficult. On the second day the Unified Command directed that there would be one OSC with CDF being the lead and included 3 Deputy Operations (LAC, LFD, and VNC) along with a Deputy Operations for Planning. The 215 planning process then worked well as each Deputy became responsible for insuring that Branch planning and agency resource concerns were addressed in a timely manner. This facilitated the development of accurate work assignments and resource utilization in the IAP.

Accomplishments:

- This was an extremely successful incident from a Unified Command perspective. The Unified IC's gave clear objectives and unified guidance to the Operations section. The integration of LAC Team #3 and CDF Team #7 went very smooth. Branch Directors and Division Supervisor were provided primarily by the unified agencies thus providing the Operations section with a wealth of local knowledge. This is extremely important when basing our tactics and strategy on local fire behavior and in planning contingencies for both structure protection and perimeter control.
- LFD Created a "Command Post" of their own at their Station 106 on the south side of the fire. Initially this was viewed as a duplication of the Unified Command's Base Camp. Under closer scrutiny became apparent that this "camp" was providing an important logistical function by supporting the LFD resources assigned to the fire. Beginning on October 30th IAPs and briefings concurrent with the Base Camp briefings were given at Station 106 and the facility began to function as a "Camp" by ICS definition. In future operations in which a jurisdiction has a need to, or can better support its resources through this arrangement, creating an agency specific base camp should be considered.
- On the night of 28th the Deputy Operations "toured" the fire obtaining a briefing from each branch. By doing this it was easier to obtain group cooperation in carrying out incident objectives. It should be recognized that in most wildland incidents this measure would not be necessary but when agencies that are not used to working in unified command are involved this tactic seemed an excellent way to obtain buy-in. This only had to be done once, immediately following the team's engagement with the incident.

Recommendation:

The radio communications in all of Southern California needs to be examined and a system of radios and repeaters needs to be created that can be accessed by all resources assigned to an emergency. This would be an outstanding use of Homeland Security moneys.

When in Unified Command and per ICS, there can be multiple Incident Commanders but only one Operations Chief. In the future this needs to be a standard practice. There can be multiple Deputies, but to insure accurate operational planning and implementation of the Incident Action Plan there can be only one Operations Chief.

Suppression Narrative by Operational Period

Topanga Incident, Los Angeles & Ventura Counties

CA-LAC 208724

September 28, 2005 – October 5, 2005

Initial Attack Actions

On September 28, 2005 at 1350 hours, first alarm resources from Los Angeles City Fire Department, Ventura County Fire Department and Los Angeles County Fire Department responded to a reported brush fire at the west bound 118 Freeway, west of Topanga Canyon Blvd. First arriving resources reported 2-3 acres of medium brush being pushed in a southwest direction by 20-25 mph winds out of the northeast. By 1415 hours, the fire had spotted south across the 118 Fwy, and was threatening numerous residential structures.

A unified command organization was established between the three agencies. The initial attack incident priorities included a defensive strategy to protect structures in the Lilac, Box Canyon, Bell Canyon, Lake Manor and West Valley areas; evacuation of threatened communities in the path of the fire, and perimeter control of the north and south flanks of the fire.

The fire was branched as follows: Branch 1 – South of 118 Fwy, east of Ventura County line; Branch 2 – South of 118 Fwy, west of Ventura County line; Branch 3 – North of 118 Fwy, west of Ventura County line.

The following Structure Protection Groups were established; Branch 1 – Bell SPG; Branch 2 – Lilac SPG; Box SPG; Woolsey SPG; Manor SPG; Branch 3 – Knolls SPG.

By 1545 hours the fire had grown to 500 acres. 35 type 1 engine strike teams and 15 type 1 crew strike teams were ordered. In addition, a Type 1 IMT was ordered.

September 29: CDF Incident Command Team #7 transitioned into the unified command at 0600 hours. The fire was approximately 10,000 - 12,000 acres and burning actively. The first 24 hour operational period, Incident Action Plan (IAP) was developed by Los Angeles County Fire (Type 2) Incident Management Team 3.

The fire continued to burn with rapid rates of spread through the chaparral fuels (6 feet) medium to heavy brush. Erratic and extreme fire behavior, with long range spotting was occurring. Based on this, both direct and indirect strategies were employed and contingency planning immediately continued after CDF Team 7 integrated with LAC Team 3. A contingency plan to assist in holding the fire north of Hwy 101, identify structure protection needs, along with the resources needed to implement the plan was translated into the IAP for 9-29-05.

Staging areas were established at Rocky Peak of the 118 Hwy and the point of origin. The second staging was established in Las Virgenes at fire station 125. The third staging was established at the Los Angeles County fire station 36.

The fire had been organized and expressed in the IAP for extended attack into 7 geographic branches. Branch I with 8 Divisions "A" through "G", 16 engine strike teams, and 13 taskforces. Branch II with 1 Division "H", 8 engine strike teams and 1 taskforce. Branch III with 2 Division

“I”, “J” and 3 Structure Protection Groups (Mt Calabasas, Liberty, and Cheseboro), 22 engine strike teams, 4 patrol units, and 3 single. Branch IV with 4 Division “K” through “N” and 3 Structure Protection Groups (Kanan, Agoura, and Oak Park), 24 engine strike teams, 9 hand crew strike teams, 6 patrol units, 4 dozer strike teams, and 4 water tenders. Branch V with 2 Divisions’ “Q” and “R”, 6 engine strike teams, 2 hand crew strike teams, 2 patrol units, and 2 water tenders. Branch VI with 6 Divisions “S” through “X”, 17 engine strike teams, 5 hand crew strike teams, 3 water tenders, 4 dozer strike teams, and 3 patrol units. Branch VII with 1 Division “Y” and “X”, 5 engine strike teams, 8 hand crew strike teams, 3 water tenders, and 3 patrol units.

The Operation Section staff consisted of 4 Operations Chiefs and 1 Deputy Chief. Each agency assigned a representative to meet their agencies operational needs.

Evacuation of communities within 12 hour threat occurred in Simi Valley, San Fernando Valley and the Las Virgenes Canyon. Road closures included Hwy 118 and Highway 23.

Direct attack occurred on the fire’s edge, where it was safe to do so with resources available. The fire spread quickly through the operational period to the south and southwest. Winds were predicted to change to S-SW on the 30th. Therefore, close attention was paid to anchor and construct line on the north and northeast portions of the fire when the wind reversal occurred. This is the same pattern that occurred in 2003 on the Simi fire and that fire reversed course as this fire was predicted to do as well. Progress was made during the operational period on the northeast end, to prevent the fire from traveling north to Hwy 126 and east to Interstate 5. Progress also occurred on the northwest perimeter of the fire. Direct handline and dozerline was constructed where the fire had crossed the Albertson Motorway and prevented the fire from flanking Simi Valley. By 1800 hours the fire had grown to 16,000 acres. The fire now spanned from Hwy 118 and Topanga Canyon road to Cheseboro Canyon road in the Simi Hills.

On the evening of September 29th the fire was traveling in a widening front from the northeast to southeast. About 2000 hours the fire made a run in the direction of Hidden Hills requiring the dispatching of about ten Strike Teams of engines to that location. In short order the fire activity died down and began to assume a slow backing movement toward the residential area. About this same time, the head of the fire was moving parallel to Los Virgenes Road approaching Highway 101. Many if not all of the Strike Teams sent to Hidden Hills ended up at LA County Station 125 on Las Virgenes Road.

Using two Los Angeles County hand crews and other resources a line was constructed from behind Station 125 north to the Augora Hill’s dump. This line was later fired and held.

At the same time the fire backed down to the structures along Las Virgenes Road and in Hidden Hills where the spread was stopped by engine companies working along the roads. The fire was actively burning and had consumed 20,655 acres.

September 30: The fire was organized with the same seven branches with the branch breaks adjusted to align with the Ventura and Los Angeles county line and the Los Angeles City fire department responsibility. The Operation Section Chief was Identified at the 0600 operational briefing as Incident Management Team 7, Gouette (day operations) Konklin as (night operation). Each agency in the Unified Command provided a Deputy Operations Chief to oversee the operational needs within their respective branches.

We continued to have unstable fire behavior. Based on weather and wind, backing fires throughout the west side of fire line. The east side of the fire was driven by north winds. The winds changed to normal influence at about 1400 hours blowing from the west to the east.

Dozer operations continued in Branch VI from the Albertson Motorway toward Branch VII. Branch VII began a dozer line operation from Hidden Ranch and Vintage Oak Ave, traveling

west where they tied into the dozer line coming from Branch VI at the Brandeis Bardin retreat. After the dozer line was tied in an aggressive firing operation was conducted along the completed dozer line from Branch VI to the east into Branch VII. At the completion of the fire operation, strike team 9481G started working the direct hand-line north to Brandeis Barton retreat area. This completed the direct hand-line for perimeter control on Branch VI and VII.

By late afternoon the air operations made significant progress allowing ground crews to go direct on fire line suppression. The fire had some continued fire spread on the northwest and southeast flanks of the fire. Approximately 4,747 acres were consumed. This was the last of the fire spread. The total acres were contained to 24,175

October 1 - 2: The fire was organized by consolidating Branches I/II staffed by LA City Fire branch director. Branches III/IV were consolidated and staffed by LA County Fire. Branches V/VI/VII were consolidated and staffed by Ventura County Fire. Branch I/II maintained 8 engine strike teams and 11 hand crew strike teams. Branch III/IV continued to consolidate divisions to I/J, K, and L/M, with 9 strike teams of engines and 5 strike teams of crews. Branch V/VI/VII was reorganized into division Q/N, R/S, T/U, V/W, and X/Y/Z, with 13 engine strike teams and 7 hand crew strike teams.

Significant down sizing occurred beginning October 2nd continuing through the 3rd. With the prediction of the extreme wind event for October 3rd, 4th, and 5th, Deputy Operation Chiefs M. Richey, and T. Henry developed a southwest fire perimeter contingency plan with trigger point to deploy staged resources in the event that the fire escapes the control lines during the high winds.

Mop up and patrol was occurring on all branches. Branch III/IV had significant mop up of hot spots around the landfill site. Operational resources made a concerted effort to utilize Infrared data, provide by LA County's IR unit, to locate and suppress hot spot before they manifest during the up coming wind event.

October 3 – 5: Resources were deployed at strategic locations around the incident for structure protection and prevent the fire from crossing the 101 Hwy. Resources were assigned to Staging to allow for the implementation of the southwest fire perimeter contingency plan.

Beginning on October 4th the Santa Ana winds surfaced over the incident. The evening of the 4th and into the 5th the winds continued to increase in intensity. Steady 40-50 mph winds with gusts in the 60-70 mph range occurred. Resources were staged to support any potential breakout and to respond to reported flare ups within the fire perimeter. Resources were moved around the incident as ash and debris were blown across the line however no spot fires occurred and the incident was declared 100% contained.

Name: Terry DeJournett, LAC	Date: October 3, 2005
Section: OPS (Planning OPS)	

Summary:
During the incident worked with IA personnel developing the 215 for the second operational period. At the Meeting on HWY 118 the OPS Chiefs in Unified command presented the current situation and that the fire had been divided into 4-branches already. Using the information provided and the number of branches, the information was transferred onto the 215

What went wrong:

During the first planning meeting the 215 had been prepared using IA information.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 215 had too many Structure branches (15) (Span of Control) • 215 was erased and changed from 4 Branches 8 Divisions to 7 Branch 26 Division fire. (agency specific issues) • Operations not Unified • Initial Division breaks on Map not on Fire Line, Same for Branch breaks (OPS need to provide clear information for good Maps) • Assignments difficult as no clear division boundary • Agencies requesting to many resources for Division. • Resources doing Structure Protection need to be divided into structure Groups not Division. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

What went right:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Recommendation:

Name: Captains Gonzalez & Howard	Date: October 4, 2005
Section: Air Operations Branch Director (AOBD) & Air Support Group Supervisor (ASGS)	

Summary:

Arrived at Agoura Hills/Calabasas Community Center in response to CDF ICT #7 activation. Received a briefing from Captains Gordon & Reynoso, LAC IMT #3 concerning night operations and the next day's aircraft request. Along with Cpts. Gordon and Reynoso, LAC; BC Buck, LFD; Air Operations relocated to Conejo Creek Park. During the following days, the unit coordinated Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR) for the incident, scheduled infrared, administrative, and cargo (sling load) missions. Additionally, the unit established helispots, briefed command and general staff members, ordered aircraft resources to support the incident objectives, and prepared and disseminated the Air Operations Summary Form, ICS 220 on a daily basis.

Challenges:

- 1) On Initial Attack, fixed-winged aircraft were unable to enter the Fire Traffic Area and engage due to their inability to contact HELCO on assigned frequencies. The fixed-winged aircraft then departed and recovered back to Fox Field.
- 2) Numerous unauthorized landings by assigned helicopters at Base/ICP.
- 3) During night operations, two LAC camp crews were struck by a "low" water drop attributed to poor communications. A SAFECOM, State Form 119 was completed.
- 4) On two occasions, LAC copters self "demobed" without authorization and responded to the "Harvard Fire" in Burbank.

Accomplishments:

- 1) Under the Unified Command structure, the unit was staffed by an AOBD from CDF, LAC and LFD. This presented a good working environment and direct contact which produced excellent communications in this critical and demanding unit.
- 2) Good communication with HELCO when coordinating helispots and "sling" missions.
- 3) When radio communications with aircraft failed, the LAC Communications Unit personnel quickly contacted AOBD with time sensitive information either via landline or runner.

Recommendation:

- 1) Initial attack HELCO should anticipate the arrival of fixed-wing aircraft and provide a good briefing focusing on frequencies, incident priorities, and objectives.
- 2) All helicopters should coordinate with either HELCO/AOBD when planning to land at landing zone/helispot and also ensure positive contact with a ground unit prior to landing on the site.
- 3) Ground units should be "clear and concise" when requesting water drops and provide safe clearance to anticipated drop area. During night drops and/or low visibility conditions, a greater safe distance should be necessary.
- 4) Air resources are assigned to the incident until released by Air Attack, HELCO, or AOBD.

Name: Assistant Fire Chief Mike Metro LAC	Date: October 2, 2005
Section: Operations Section, Evacuation Branch	

Summary:

I was assigned by IC Bryant to set up an evacuation plan for the impacted areas of the Topanga Fire and implement the plan when trigger points were reached. Initially set up a coordination center in the Agoura Hills Community Center with BC Al Schriver. Agency representatives were identified to assist including LA Co Sheriffs, Ventura County Sheriffs, LAPD, CHP, local city officials, Cal Trans, and others. The Evacuation Branch CP was later moved to Conego Creek Park.

The plan was developed and 17 communities were given orders to evacuate, 3 communities were placed under an evacuation warning and 13 communities were provided evacuation advisements. Evacuation routes were identified as well as 4 evacuation shelters, which were supported by the Red Cross.

Criteria were developed for opening up a community to residents only and that was implemented in the third and subsequent operational periods. Additional criteria were developed to lift all restrictions and that was implemented on 9-30 and 10-1.

All communities had all restrictions lifted by 10-1-05. The Red Cross Shelters were ordered closed by 1700 hours on 10-1-05.

Challenges:

- When a community was placed under different stages of evacuation, it was the responsibility of the jurisdictional law enforcement agency to implement that order according to certain criteria. It was found that in certain cases this was not done. Examples:
 - In a few areas, access to evacuated communities was not provided with sufficient security to keep residents from re-entering.
 - In a few cases, when access was restricted to residents only, security checkpoints were not initiated and ID's were not checked. Instead, security patrols were set up within the neighborhoods.
- Evacuation trigger points were set up that would indicate the need to evacuate a neighborhood. These trigger points were geographic areas that when the fire reached them, certain things would be implemented. The intel from Ops was rarely current enough to provide sufficient status to implement the evacuations until after the fire passed the trigger points. Better intel is critical to implement both evacuations and structure protection.
- Need to have better linkages with PIO. The news media had wrong information regarding evacuated areas, which was problematic, especially for the city officials and the public who constantly called in. Example was the media reported several communities south of the 101 were under orders to evacuate when they never were. Once this does occur, which it inevitably will, PIO needs to work with the media to correct this.
- When the base is set up, the law enforcement CP's need to have their equipment (eg: vans, trailers, etc, set up close to the Evacuation Branch CP)
- County Road Department was not included in the agency rep team. This proved problematic.
- Independent action was done in the field, which confused operations.
- Field suppression personnel, when frustrated with "lookie Lou's" would call for an evacuation when in actuality; they would only need to move out those who did not live in the area. This created confusion.
- Each jurisdiction was developing evacuation plans independently from each other. Eg: Ventura County and LA City Fire did not know there was an evacuation branch set up at the incident. This caused

independent action and multiple communities being evacuated using the same escape routes. This could have been disastrous.

- The Evacuation Branch was not reflected in the IAP's until the third operational period nor was any mention of its existence discussed during the briefings. This likely led to the above problem.

Accomplishments:

- Setting up an Evacuation Branch was an excellent move. Typically this function is given to the Ops Chief, who is already overloaded.
- This provided for an orderly evacuation well ahead of the arrival of the head of the fire and the chaos that would have ensued.
- Co-locating with law enforcement agency reps in a single room, as was done at the first ICP was excellent. I only had to point or ask and the rep was there. This was more difficult at the second ICP when law enforcement CP's were set up at various places throughout the base camp.
- The decision point for evacuations was vested in the Evacuation branch and hence this cut down on confusion.

Recommendation:

1. Set up an Evacuation Branch during the initial stages of initial action. Use a Chief officer for this function.
2. Provide better intel on fire progress so evacuation trigger points can be managed.
3. Develop stronger links with unified command agencies regarding evacuation activities. This is critical for it will eliminate the duplication of a single escape route by multiple jurisdictions which could be disastrous.
4. Ensure that the Evacuation Branch is indicated on the IAP with its own 204 that shows evacuation routes and shelter locations.
5. Ensure that the evacuation plan is discussed during the morning briefings.
6. Provide a PIO at the Evacuation Branch CP for better communications.
7. Have PIO correct the media when misinformation is being provided to the public.
8. Have Base Operations set up the base with the law enforcement CP's and Evacuation Branch CP located next to each other or better yet, the CP's should be set up in a "circle" so as they all face each other.
9. Develop information statements for law enforcement that provides, in layman terms, the fundamentals of the evacuation process, such as the difference between an advisement, a warning and an order.

Name: Terry DeJournett, LAC	Date: October 3, 2005
Section: OPS (Planning OPS)	

Summary:
During the incident worked with IA personnel developing the 215 for the second operational period. At the Meeting on HWY 118 the OPS Chiefs in Unified command presented the current situation and that the fire had been divided into 4-branches already. Using the information provided and the number of branches, the information was transferred onto the 215

Challenges:
<p>During the first planning meeting the 215 had been prepared using IA information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 215 had too many Structure branches (15) (Span of Control) • 215 was erased and changed from 4 Branches 8 Divisions to 7 Branch 26 Division fire. (agency specific issues) • Operations not Unified • Initial Division breaks on Map not on Fire Line, Same for Branch breaks (OPS need to provide clear information for good Maps) • Assignments difficult as no clear division boundary • Agencies requesting to many resources for Division. • Resources doing Structure Protection need to be divided into structure Groups not Division.

Accomplishments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team started making corrections at next operational period. • Branches eliminated • Divisions shortened • Agencies accommodated and specific request taken care of at strategy meeting

Recommendation:
<p>Modify the 215 that is prepared only if needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave agency politics out of process as much as possible • Plan should be based on need not politics • Plan should reflect the dynamics of the current situation • Agencies need to understand the difference between Division and Group assignments • Fire should be branched only when Span of Control or geographical issues reflect need.

Name: Scott Poster, LAC IMT 3 Steve Beach, ICT 7	Date: 10-05-05
Section: Planning	

Summary:

Los Angeles County Incident Management Team 3 was activated and responded to the Topanga Fire on Wednesday, September 28, 2005. The initial members arrived to the ICP located on the 118 Freeway west of Topanga. Gerald Meehan and Janel Stevenson started acquiring pertinent information to facilitate construction of an incident map. A request was placed for a CDF Incident Command Team to support the incident. PSC Poster and Dull also responded to the ICP. The initial operational briefing was given on the freeway at the ICP at 1900. The ICP temporarily relocated to the Lost Hills Community Center in Calabasas. Rod Megli the Planning Section Chief from CDF ICT7 was already at the community center.

The planning section was established with a resource and situation unit (including GIS) at the community center. An operational planning worksheet (215) was developed by the Planning OSC Terry Dejournett with information provided by the Operations Section. A planning meeting was conducted to discuss the plan for the day operational period.

PSC Megli sat in on the Planning Meeting to help identify the Planning section personnel that were in place. It was noted that a Unified Command and a Unified Operations Section were struggling to get organized. The issues and politics surrounding the unification effort rendered the planning process ineffective. He noted that beyond simply managing the fire incident, the Unified Command and the Operations section were also struggling to incorporate solutions to political concerns into the Incident Action Plan.

In the early hours of Thursday, September 29, PSC Megli was able to meet LAC Team # 3 Planning Section Chiefs Roy Dull, and Scott Poster. By this time they were in a mighty struggle to produce a written IAP for the 0600 briefing. They were forced to do so with very little in the way of resource information, and an extremely short timeline. The result was an initial IAP that contained little information.

PSC Megli also observed attempts by Plans Section personnel from VNC, LAC, and LFD to integrate met with limited success. There seemed to be a reluctance to share information and resources. VNC Situation Unit Leader Mel Smith related that his attempts to share mapping data with LAC GIS Tech/Spec were greeted by a reluctance of the LAC GIS person to share information.

After the 0600 briefing a meeting was held with all planning section personnel from CDF Team 7, LAC Team #3, and LFD personnel who were present. The current situation was discussed along with the objectives for the Planning Section and who would perform which tasks. The Planning Section was to be unified (CDF Team#7 / LAC Team #3) and share planning section responsibilities. After the meeting, LFD and LAC Team #3 personnel went off-shift for rest. CDF Team #7 Personnel went to work to start getting a good count and status of all resources assigned to the Incident. Later in the day, at 1430hrs work was suspended to move the planning section to the Incident Base at Conejo Creek Park. PSC Dull was released from the incident for another fire response.

The planning section was re-established with a complete Resource Unit and Situation Unit (including GIS). The positions of training specialist and computer specialist were established. A documentation unit leader and demobilization unit leader were requested. Staffing requests were submitted for all units to ordering.

The planning cycle was initiated for a 24 hour operational period. One Incident Action Plan was required daily. The planning section overhead staff operated 24 hours with day and night shifts. Team 3 PSC Poster was assigned to the night shift and PSC Megli was assigned to the day shift. PSC Megli conducted the daily briefings. Team 7 PSC Beach arrived to the fire on Friday, September 30, 2005 and assumed the lead as PSC for the incident. Once PSC Beach arrived he assumed the day shift and conducted the daily briefings. PSC Megli demobilized on Sunday, October 2, 2005 due to illness.

The Unified Command structure on this incident from a Plans point of view was challenging. Having 2 teams integrated presented some initial problems due to procedural differences by agency. Once delegation of workload was agreed upon and flow of information was established, things fell into place. Having several qualified people available immediately solved many staffing issues that Plans faces on every fire.

Collective information distribution in the form of a 209 can drive how the incident is perceived by the home agencies and the elected officials. This incident saw great cooperation between VNC, LAC, and CDF because there is now a national standard for 209 processing, and an understanding of how to use the system is paramount.

It is important to remember that a clear line of separation be established when transitioning from initial attack to extended attack and then to major fire structure. The key to success in the transition is clear strategic direction along with clear, concise rules of engagement for those integrating into the structure. This did not occur on this incident. An organized transition did not happen, nor did a written transition plan get presented. These key components set the tone for the future of the incident. Overall the Plans Section functioned smoothly and was staffed with a group of motivated individuals.

Observations from PSC Megli:

“My observations are that personnel from different agencies and from different Teams were reluctant to open up and share with each other. I observed some genuine attempts to establish cooperation rebuffed by “the other side”. Time was a critical commodity for all commanders, but I think a few moments to make a formal introduction of the Teams and establish the objective of cooperation would have gained some precious time an earlier cooperation to the benefit of all.

The Planning process and timeline are what keep any incident running smoothly. They are both critical to success, and are simply what separates planned and coordinated extended attack from a continuous initial attack. On the Topanga incident, the process was repeatedly violated. That may have been due to the politics involved, some inexperience, or a combination of both. Example: A strategy meeting would be held for the purpose of completing a form #215. All participants were asked for, and provided, their input, but not all of it. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Unified IC's and Deputy Operations members would immediately jump up and start making changes to the plan they had just agreed to. The extreme case of this resulted in a very ineffective initial IAP at 06:00 on the morning of September 29. At the 18:00 briefing on September 29, the result was not only a poorly developed IAP, but the lack of a single identified Operations Chief to brief those attending on the plan.

Tremendous progress was made by LFD, LAC, VNC, NPS and CDF in establishing a Unified Command, and having the Incident be managed by a Team. However it was still a rough experience, and there are many areas that can be improved upon. Greater effort in developing greater familiarity and trust among the personnel of each agency will go a long way to improving unified efforts of the future. Also, we need to develop trust and cooperation between agencies to a level such that none of the agencies involved feel they need to establish a separate, parallel and duplicate effort to achieve their objectives for the incident.”

Demobilization Unit

The demobilization unit was staffed by DMOB Darryl Cleveland and ran without a hitch. Overall, DMOB went exceptionally well. None of the personnel expressed concern or statement of being overwhelmed. To our knowledge incident personnel did not have any issues with the process or time that DMOB took to accomplish. On our biggest day, the unit released over 1100 personnel off the incident.

Challenges:

The biggest issue that arose in DMOB was the LFD resources that neither checked in through the incident Base or were released via the DMOB unit. At a point when the incident was releasing these resources they wanted to DMOB there resources through us for a paper trail.

The resolution was to have them make a list of their resources with the request numbers. We then faxed the list to expanded to have them released in MIRPS but no physical DMOB from base.

In the future it would be helpful if LFD played by the same rules of engagement and disengagement as everyone else on the incident.

Accomplishments:

- The DMOB plan seemed to work as planned without any major issues.
- Ground support and Supply worked exceptionally well with the DMOB unit.
- Ground support was well staffed and extremely efficient in their operation.
- The unit was well staffed and the personnel did an exceptional job of working together and coordinating their efforts with other incident components to make the DMOB process as efficient as possible.
- Expanded worked well with us and had no major issues arise during DMOB even during our busier times.

One of the secrets to the success of this DMOB was to call out the resources being released prior to morning briefing and giving them their instructions face to face.

Recommendations:

- No recommendations other than the LFD issue.
- It was a pleasure to work with LAC and CDF Team 7.

Documentation Unit

The documentation unit was staffed by DOCL O'Meara and ran very well the documentation package was prepared for VNC.

When analyzing the Unit Log (ICS214) inputs from incident resources it appeared that local government resources had a greater percentage of submittals than state and federal agencies. The Unit Log data was critical to the incident due to cost apportionment concerns.

Training Specialist (Bryan Kidder / Nick Duvally)

Upon arrival to the incident contact was made with the PSC2. Initial expectations were reviewed. The Training Specialist established a work area at the initial ICP with the Logistics group. When the ICP was moved an area was obtained in the Logistics trailer. Information was provided at the Operations Briefings and the IAP that the Training Specialist was available to register all trainees. In addition contact was made with Ordering and Check-In/Resources to identify additional trainees. After several operational periods all sections of the incident were visited to ensure that all trainees had been identified and signs were posted at strategic locations to further announce the location of the Training Specialist.

At the peak of the incident there were 123 trainees. Of the 123 trainees the following have turned in their completed packets, there were 11 trainees in Command, 60 in Operations, 10 in Plans, 10 in Logistics and 6 in Finance. The remaining packets will be closed out at the end of the incident. The large number of trainees in Operations can be attributed to the ending of the historical recognition process for CICCIS. At this time there are 31 trainees that have been recommended for certification.

Due to the complexity of the incident, unified command, dynamic fire behavior and moving the base location. There were numerous logistical obstacles that needed to be overcome. Initially there was a single TNSP who had never functioned in this position before. At times information that was provided to the other Planning sections was not passed on to the TNSP and several meetings were missed. As the incident stabilized the training process progressed in a much smoother manner. Two additional TNSP's were assigned to the unit to assist in the trainee / TNSP ratio.

Planning Section Conclusions:

Challenges:

- No formal transition occurred, nor did a written CDF transition document get produced. A transition meeting (in-briefing) should have been conducted and an Incident Briefing Form 201 should have been completed by the IAIC. Both the command teams should have been in attendance.
- Contract counties do not seem to be using MIRPS to its full intended extent. Request numbers need to be created as units and personnel are dispatched to avoid having to “catch-up.”
- The planning cycle is absolutely critical to the success of large incident structure. The cycle was attempted to be followed, and got better through the incident, but was allowed to flounder in many instances and this created problems in production of a timely, quality IAP.
- The Infra red capabilities of LAC Fire need to be converted to GIS ARC-9, and need a GIS Tech assigned when used. The LAT/LONG needs to be inserted into a dialog box on the map next to each source to allow correct navigation to the area. The current accepted fireline should not be deviated from when creating these maps, this is why it is so critical map layers are the same.
- Having separate ICP's and Camps create a serious issue for Plans. We are mandated to provide a detailed briefing by incident command staff for operational resources, this created concerns for Plans that critical issues were not covered in a formal manner. Questions that arose could not be properly addressed.

Accomplishments:

- Demob went as well as I have seen on a complex fire in a long time. A plan was in place well before the need and was pulled off without a hitch.
- Division of labor was well understood among the Plans Chiefs and the job tasks were completed in a timely manner.
- Having 2 GIST's on the incident, one from each team allowed timely production of maps.
- The collective voice from the Unified Command staff was coordinated well by Chief Heil.
- Having the LAC trailers made life easy for us.

Recommendations:

- 1) A formal transition needs to occur regardless of the intensity of the incident. This allows for firm direction and strategic objectives to be relayed/established. If a CDF team is to be used, the team transition document allows key points to be covered.
- 2) MIRPS must be adhered to when dispatching a fire when outside resources are to be used. We rely on this document to track all resources assigned to the incident. This also is critical in tracking costs.
- 3) The planning process needs to be adhered to. Jurisdictional lines need to be dissolved as much as possible to allow for correct resource allocation.

One central location must be used for command and control. This includes support and briefings. We are creating liability for ourselves by letting two operations exist. One single collective message needs to be delivered to the troops.

Name: Chuck Marin, ICT 7	Date: Oct. 3, 2005
Section: Unified Logistics Section	

Summary:

The Unified Command structure for this incident is unique. Each jurisdiction has a "Team" which was integrated into one incident Logistics Team. Los Angeles County (LAC) Team 3 Logistics Section Chiefs (LSC) Frank Vidales and Mike Takeshita were the initial attack LSCs. They supported the incident and started the planning process for the ensuing logistics operations. Ventura County LSC Larry Williams entered the mix a couple of hours later and coordinated with the LAC Logistics to support the incident and locate a suitable site for the incident base and ICP. The ICP was relocated twice, from the initial attack location of Hwy 118 and Topanga Canyon Rd. to Agoura Hills/Calabasas Community Center (AHCCCC) to the final location of the Conejo Creek Park (CCP). These transitions always create problems but were eased by the attention given by the logistics staff. Los Angeles Fire Department (LFD) assigned a Logistics Trainee into the mix on day two. LFD had set up a Camp outside of the established incident logistics section to support the LFD personnel assigned to the incident. LSC Trainee Craig White was assigned to the incident Logistics Section to coordinate LFD's support needs and worked with Frank Vidales. This worked well and gave LFD personnel the opportunity to get a more global view of the ICS operations.

The ICP at AHCCC worked well for initial operations. Meeting rooms, phone and fax lines, and good parking were immediately available for the operation. This facility worked well for the initial attack period but does not have enough room for a large incident.

The CCP incident base location is a great facility with room for a 5000+ as an incident base. At peak occupation the facility handled 3000 personnel with a lot of room left for expansion. This facility just recently contracted with Ventura County FD for use as mobilization center and had been pre-planned for incident base set up. The unified logistics staff made recommendations to Larry Williams for needed modifications to the existing pre-plan for the next utilization of this facility.

LAC Expanded Dispatch was ill equipped for this incident and a lot of time was wasted with re-ordering needed resources. Orders were lost and had to be resubmitted numerous times to fill the orders. LAC Expanded doesn't have any emergency resource directory and the procurement team didn't have a good grasp of what was needed when contracting for services.

Incident Communications were a problem from day one of the incident. Common frequencies between the agencies were difficult to coordinate. LAC, LFD, and VNC could all communicate using LAC Blue 2 UHF frequency but the Forest Agencies did not have the capability to use this frequency since they use VHF frequencies. This issue is thirty plus years old, recommendations from Firescope (1970) and the Blue Ribbon Commission (2003) state the need for common communications and the use of VHF frequencies. The changing advancements in communications and the dollars needed to keep up with the changes are both obstacles to correcting these problems. Add to this the Federal governments switching to narrow band VHF and the limited ability to communicate between narrow band VHF and older non-narrow banded VHF radios and we are setting up for a major problem. Equipment was used to patch together the UHF, VHF, and 800 radios with some success but should not be considered a fix to the communications problems that we faced.

The incident was a major media event because of the close proximity to the cities within LA county. There were a few extra events outside of the normal incident support issues. Media news conferences, legislative tours, and a visit from the Governor added demands to the logistics staff duties. The level of experience and the depth of the logistics staff personnel allowed for all events being handled well.

This Unified Command incident created many opportunities for logistical failures but because of the cooperation and willingness to work together as one logistics team the Incident Logistics Section was able to meet the operational and political needs of the incident.

Challenges:

- LAC Expanded Dispatch had problems filling orders. LAC Expanded Dispatch needs to train and staff with personnel qualified in the ordering process. LAC Expanded Dispatch did not have an “Emergency Resource Directory” for utilizing local vendors for this incident. LAC Procurement tried to fill these requests, but because they are not familiar with incident needs, they were set up for failure supporting the incident.
- Communications – Three separate Communications plans were established for the second burning period. Too many frequencies were used but are not compatible with the ICS policy for using VHF frequencies.
 - LFD City Chiefs are the only LFD units that carry VHF radios. LFD older frontline engines only carry 800 MHZ band radios, which are not compatible with most other departments. They also do not carry VHF programmable handheld radios.
 - LAC Fire had the wrong NIFC tactical frequencies. They had U.S.F.S. tactical frequencies instead of NIFC tactical frequencies. Their channel plan has not been updated since 2003.
 - Ventura County Fire either tried to hand program or their original programming in their mobile radio were wrong on some of the tactical frequencies.
 - Narrow banding problems surfaced in the tactical frequencies on the line. All the agencies that have old BK radios including CDF had problems with this.
 - Enough radios to properly support the incident had to be flown in from Boise, Idaho. The time it took for this to happen hampered the ability to set a proper radio system for the fire.
 - Dispatchers ordered for the communications unit were not filled. 1 fill out of 10 ordered. 1 out of 2 INMC's were filled. 0 out of 2 COML trainees were filled.
- Initial independent logistics actions outside of the established Unified Command system by LFD at Station 106. This was immediately corrected by the LFD IC when the problem was presented to him.
- LA Sheriff and LA County Fire helicopters continued to land at the CCP facility, even after discussion with Air Ops that this could not occur due to safety concerns.
- Larger than normal media attention and the positioning of their trucks in the foot traffic area of the incident base. More coordination is needed with Information Officers to lessen the impact to logistics.
- Fire equipment continued to ignore the traffic plan and parking signs causing a lot of congestion.

Accomplishments:

- Interaction with all the agency logistics representatives was outstanding. Good communications and ability to utilize their local knowledge for incident needs.
- Filling many of the logistics positions with the cooperating agencies personnel. Great depth in experience and staff.
- The Incident Base at Conejo Creek Park proved to be a good site for incident base. The park is under agreement with VNC for use as an Incident base and was pre-planned by a VNC person for an incident base.
- Setting up the Logistics organization with LAC, VNC, and LFD Logistics Section Chiefs as deputies under my lead. All decisions relating solely to one of the cooperating agencies were discussed with the corresponding logistics deputy before a decision was made.
- Having access to a number of cooperating agency stake side trucks with operators for supply runs and back haul.

- Use of the LAC incident command trailers – well thought out and extremely functional.
- Use of the LAC food dispensing trucks the initial day with the food provided by one of the camps and to support the feeding of firefighters at LFD Station 106.
- Prado MKU provided good well balanced meals throughout the incident even during the time of high numbers of personnel and poor counts.

Recommendations:

- LAC could improve their expanded dispatch center by establishing an Emergency Resource Guide and by training their dispatchers on MIRPS so that they can immediately enter orders directly into the system instead of making lists for later entry.
- VHF Radio caches should be established and kept available for use during all risk incidents using ICS operations. Relying on the patching equipment used on this incident should not be considered as an alternative to radio caches. Technology is new and difficult to utilize because of the narrow banded VHF radio frequencies.
- Unified Commanders need to enter their agencies into all levels in the ICS operation, once unified command is established. Any separate planning meetings by the different agencies should include the logistics representative from that agency.
- Pre-planned locations within the city and counties for incident base and camps listing maximum capacity and ability to access utilities. Pre-use completion of use agreements for the different facilities would also be beneficial.
- As we did this time, incorporate the local agency personnel into the operations and support systems

Name: Peter Peisch	Date: October 2, 2005
Section: Finance	

Summary:

The Topanga Incident began on SRA in LAC but quickly spread to include Ventura County, Los Angeles City, National Park Service and several cities. Unified Command was set up with VNC, LAC, LFD, NPS, and CDF. As the fire grew LAC brought in their Incident Team 3 and set up the ICP in Agoura Hills for Incident support. During the second burning period, Thursday at about 1300 hours the ICP and Incident Base was moved to a large park to support the large number of Incident related resources. Also CDF Team 7 was assigned and blended with LAC Team 3 for the Incident support. VNC also provided Incident Finance support personnel. A Cost Apportionment Team was established to develop cost share for federal and state DPA. The Unified Ordering point was LAC expanded. The fire burned 24,135 acres, mostly SRA.

Challenges:

- The ordering process seemed to be very difficult. Requests for resources for Finance positions were lost, changed and/or doubled. This caused extended delays in filling positions and providing CDF financial support to the Incident. A specific example was the Cost Apportionment Team (CAT). The CAT was ordered on Thursday, September 29th but the first Cost Analysts did not arrive until Saturday, October 1st. This created delays in gathering information and opportunities to interview initial attack personnel from other agencies were lost when those resources were released.
- Finance positions on the teams 'punch list' were not ordered, creating delays in receiving Time Unit Personnel. This had the potential of creating major problems in time keeping for CDF personnel and private vendors.
- The federal time recorded was ordered but was returned as unable to fill. The federal liaison was not able to help and it was agreed to send all federal resources to home units. No federal time records were retained by the Incident.

Accomplishments:

- Cooperation between agencies was one of the high points. This is not to say that there were not financial bumps but the issues were easy to resolve. Very few, if any, vendor problems were encountered and the local county parks and schools were able to provide space for Incident needs on very short notice.
- LAC provided network services, support, and telephone for the Incident.

Recommendation:

Not really sure how to "fix" the ordering process but maybe increased MIRPS training and experience for the personnel that are assigned in expanded dispatch positions. Also it may help to expose expanded dispatch trainees to CDF ordering process via assignments to CDF unit ECCs during going incidents.

Name: David Shy	Date: 10-5-05
Section: Fire Suppression Repair	

Summary:

- Repaired several miles of dozer line as well as hand lines.
- A couple of roads were opened by dozers to allow fire suppression activities within the National Park Services area.
- Several crossing were bladed over and filled in to allow for fire equipment to access the fire.
- One large safety zone was created along a dozer line. Most of the vegetation from the safety zone was pushed into the adjacent watercourse as well as some fill.
- Graded Albertson motorway.

What went wrong:

- No known problems where raised.

What went right:

- Good team work with all personal.
- All personal regardless of agency worked very well with other agencies.
- All duties that were asked of them were completed to a satisfactory level.

Recommendation:

- Continue with a good working relationship between the operations side of the incident and the fire suppression repair.